

POEM STARTERS

for Beginners

Need a kick-start for writing poetry? Try these poetry ideas.

A Simple Metaphor

(look at Valerie Worth's poems for examples):

1. Choose an object (shell, flower, pinecone, snow).
2. Brainstorm metaphors: what does it look like? Feel like? Smell like? What could it be used for?
3. Write a poem celebrating this object, using metaphor. Be playful & imaginative. "My shell looks like a castle in an undersea kingdom, with a spotted spiral staircase. It feels smooth, like the slide on the playground."

Letter Poem

(look at the book *Dear World* by Takayo Noda)

1. Choose some part of nature (wind, sun, lake, tree).
2. Think: Why is it important? How is it beautiful? What have you always wanted to know about it?
3. Write a poem addressed to it, with a compliment, a description, a question, a wish. "Dear leaf: your bumpy veins look just like a tiny tree. How does it feel to fly on the wind?"

Animal Me

(look at the book *I'm as Quick as a Cricket* by Don & Audrey Wood)

1. What do you feel like when you're happy, sad, embarrassed? Choose an emotion to write about, and use an animal metaphor to describe yourself: "When I am happy, I'm a horse, kicking its heels."
2. Or, describe everyone in your family in terms of an animal: "Dad is like a bear, with big warm hugs."

I Like

(look at David McCord's poem "Crows"):

1. Choose something you like (rabbits, pizza, running down a hill)
2. Think of everything you like about it, using as much detail as possible.
3. Write an "I like" poem, listing all those things: "Rabbits: I like their long fuzzy ears. I like the way they freeze when they're scared. I like the quick munching of their little jaws."

I Used to/ But now . . .

(from Kenneth Koch's book, *Rose Where Did You Get that Red?*)

1. Write a growing up poem, about how you've changed since you were younger.

2. Start each sentence with the phrase "I used to . . ." and end it with, "but now . . ." "I used to be afraid of fire engines. Now I love the color red!"

Quiet/Noisy Poems

(look at Susan Marie Swanson's "Breathing", from *Getting Used to the Dark*)

1. Think of lots of quiet (or noisy) things--weather, food, animals, etc:
2. Write a quiet (noisy) poem, taking three of these things and writing a whole phrase about them: "A cloud drifting across the sky. / A cow, sleeping on its feet. / Three green apples on a tree, waiting to be eaten."
3. Then add yourself in, describing what you do when you're quiet. "And me, curled up reading a book."

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